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Letter dated 22 December 2016 from the Permanent Representatives of Spain and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Spain and the United Kingdom, as Co-Chairs of the Informal Expert Group on Women and Peace and Security, have the honour to transmit herewith a summary note of the meeting held on 18 October 2016 on women and peace and security in Iraq (see annex).

We would be grateful if the present letter and its annex could be circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Román **Oyarzun**
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to the United Nations

(*Signed*) Matthew **Rycroft**
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Annex to the letter dated 22 December 2016 from the Permanent Representatives of Spain and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Informal Expert Group on Women and Peace and Security

Summary of the follow-up meeting on Iraq, 18 October 2016

The meeting was attended by members of the Security Council and representatives of the United Nations Secretariat, agencies, funds and programmes. The main briefer was the Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Political Affairs, United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI), György Busztin, accompanied by senior mission staff and heads of United Nations agencies from Baghdad and Erbil.

The Mission expressed serious concern over the humanitarian situation of women and girls in the wake of the impending military operation to liberate Mosul from Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), in a context in which one third of the population of Iraq is already in need of humanitarian assistance and several million people will be newly displaced in the coming months. Approximately 3,000 Yazidi women and girls are believed to be enslaved, and there are rumours that they have been recently moved to strategic locations to be used as human shields. Human rights monitors have noted that the prices of women and girls have doubled or tripled in recent days and that there is increased trafficking activity.

Women's protection concerns in Iraq go beyond sexual violence. Women may suffer retaliation or be suspected of having collaborated with ISIL, be the victims of so-called "honour killings" or be subjected to indefinite family separation. Ahead of the attack on Mosul, Iraq already had 1.6 million widows; this number is expected to increase in the next few weeks. In the areas it occupies, ISIL has been targeting not just members of minority communities, but all women who do not conform to their interpretation of gender roles, including doctors, journalists, members of parliament or women in public life in general. There is concern about the treatment of children born of rape by ISIL fighters and how they will be registered and listed in their birth certificates.

In addition, throughout the country, the escalation of the conflict has coincided with reduced space for women's political representation and economic participation and the protection of their rights. It is imperative to advocate for temporary special measures for women's participation in any transition plans, especially in liberated areas.

In response to questions from Security Council members, participants from Baghdad, Erbil and New York added the following points:

- The stronger language on women and peace and security in the mandate of UNAMI after the first meeting of the Informal Expert Group on Iraq was welcomed by the Mission's national partners in the Government and civil society.

- There is a need to redouble efforts to ensure that the Government of Iraq mandates and empowers a strong ministerial lead to implement the national action plan on resolution 1325 (2000) and the national strategy on the advancement of women. Advocacy with the Government on this matter has taken a back seat owing to the Government's focus on the Mosul operation.

- The recently signed joint communiqué with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict is a welcome step, but the Government's capacity to implement it is significantly limited. A Senior Women's Protection Adviser will be deployed in 2017, and UNAMI is already engaging with the central Government of Iraq and the regional government in Kurdistan, as well as with religious leaders, in particular on the issue of stigmatization, but additional support from the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict and its Team of Experts on the Rule of Law and Sexual Violence in Conflict will be needed. A sharp increase in the number of sexual violence survivors is expected among women not only from minority communities, but from all communities in liberated areas. The focus of the joint communiqué is on a number of areas of work, the main ones being justice and accountability for sexual and gender-based crimes committed in Iraq and against Iraqi nationals in the Syrian Arab Republic, livelihood support for survivors, direct support for children born of rape and data collection and documentation in liberated areas, with emphasis placed on the protection of women in efforts to counter ISIL. The development of implementation plans and the appointment of high-level government focal points at the central and regional levels will be required.

- Delays in the adoption of the Family Protection Law and current issues with the existing draft legislation with regard to the protection of women and girls are affecting advocacy efforts to provide legal coverage for non-governmental organizations to operate shelters for women and girls in Iraq, whose existence is very precarious at the moment. There are some signs that the parliament may be open to introducing more favourable provisions in the current bill.

The Co-Chairs thanked their colleagues in Iraq for sharing detailed information on developments in the past six months and on the most urgent issues of concern regarding the current security and humanitarian situation, expressed the need for such rich analysis to be better integrated in the Mission's periodic reports and in briefings to the Security Council, and proposed keeping Iraq on the agenda of the Informal Expert Group, given the complexity of the situation and the critical nature of ongoing developments.